"Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, sitting before a grate fire, were alone in their room, and they greeted me most pleasantly"

MY RECOLLECTIONS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By Gibson William Harris

A Law Student in Lincoln and Herndon's Office From 1845 to 1847

EDITOR'S NOTE—In this issue of the Woman's Home Companion Mr. Harris concludes his series of four articles begun in the November number. Naturally, these unique contributions to Lincoln literature have attracted much attention.

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A Change of Plans—Fulfilled Predictions

MR. LINCOLN'S chief interest in his law student pertained to the young man as an individual. But he could not well ignore my studies altogether, and at the end he put me through a course of examination that was searching enough as to the principles of law, but noticeably lax on pleading and rules of evidence—for which I was thankful. Having received my diploma and experienced the satisfaction of knowing that my name had been enrolled on the list of attorneys for the state of Illinois, I went home. This was in April,

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STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS

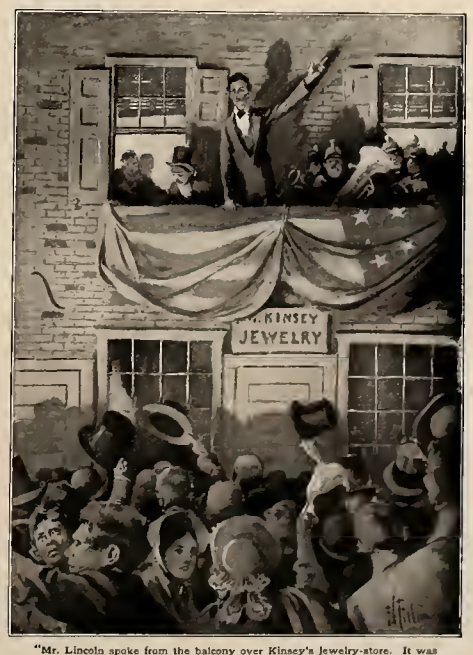
1847. The reason for the premature return to Albion was the illness of my father. By May he was confined to his bed; he died the following December, after having obtained a promise from me, as the eldest of a large family, that I would remain with my mother until a younger brother could take my place.

My father was born and reared in Connecticut, whence he rode on horseback to Vincennes, Indiana, there joining a brother who had preceded him. The two brothers were in the employ of the government as land-surveyors, and during the next few years a considerable portion of Indiana was surveyed and mapped by them.' In view of the common but mistaken impression that the perpetuity of the Union was not regarded as mootable until immediately before the Civil War, it may be pertinent to mention that my father in his last illness discussed this very matter repeatedly. The struggle for its existence, he told me, though not to come in his time, would come in mine; slavery would be the cause, but he had an abiding faith that that institution would be done away with, the government be preserved, and the country grow mightily in power and grandeur. Abraham Lincoln was only one among many holding similar opinions. I doubt whether in any section of the country such views gained earlier or more extensive currency than they did in Illinois.

Lincoln's Love for the Union

Mr. Lincoln's devotion to theUnion was a fixed habit of thought long before the War of Secession. It was part and parcel of his consciousness. But it was not the Union as merely a convenient political adaptation that he loved. He loved it because he was bed-rocked in the conviction that only through the Union could be realized his heart's ideal of "a government of the people, by the people, for the people." More than once I heard him say our form of government was the nearest perfection of any he knew of, in the extent to which it represented and protected the masses; in fact, the government was the people's—in their hands to make or mar.

The first public intimation Lincoln gave of his position on slavery was in 1837, while a member of the Illinois Legislature. Resolutions were carried through that body strongly censuring the formation and the teachings of Abolition Societies,and affirming not only "that the right of property in slaves is sacred to the slave-holding states by the Federal Constitution, and they cannot be deprived of that right without their consent," but "that the general government cannot abolish slavery in the District of Columbia against the



"Mr. Lincoln spoke from the balcony over Kinsey's Jewelry-store. It was on Saturday night, and the assemblage was immense"

consent of the citizens of said district, without a manifest breach of good faith." Abraham Lincoln and Daniel Stone, both from Sangamon County, entered a formal protest and caused it to be spread on the journal of the House. In this protest they expressed the opinions that "the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy, but that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than abate its evils. They believe that the Congress of the United States has no power under the Constitution to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different states. They believe that the Congress of the United States *has* the power under the Constitution to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, but that the power ought not to be exercised unless at the request of the people of the district."

ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE OF THE LINCOLN ASSOCIATION, ST. LOUIS, TO THE TOMB OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Slowly Ripening Views

Read in the light of after events the foregoing expressions seem tame enough; but in reality the step that Lincoln took was a bold one. Not only was he the son of a slave state, not only had he spent his whole life either in Kentucky or in those sections of Indiana and Illinois which had been predominately settled by Kentuckians, but practically all these people believed in the "peculiar institution," and it was to them he owed his seat in the legislature. Slowly yet surely his views continued to ripen. In the closing days of his terms in Congress, in 1849, he introduced a resolution for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, but of course nothing came of it.

The Whig party died. Throughout the Know-Nothing turmoil that followed Lincoln remained in his tent, but not to sulk, and when he emerged it was to take a prominent part in the building up of a new party fundamentally opposed to slavery extension.

That Abraham Lincoln at any period of his life was influenced in his course respecting slavery by any of his fellows I disbelieve absolutely. He was a born leader, with profound convictions of right and wrong, and a judgment so keen that no sophistry could blind it. The repeal of the Missouri Compromise, in 1854, roused his whole nature. The world knows the rest.

Personal Relations of Lincoln and Douglas

Stephen A. Douglas lived in Chicago after the early 40's, hence I saw but little of him, though, as being a student in Lincoln's office, I was honored with an invitation to the ball that he gave on his first election to the United States Senate. Lincoln and he were personal friends, or at least treated each other as such. I never heard Mr. Lincoln speak an ill word of Judge Douglas (nor, for that matter, of any one else).

As early as the time when I first knew Mr. Lincoln, it was undoubtedly true that in the fireside discussions with such minds as Douglas, Calhoun, Logan, Lamborn and Baker—all men of note—he was easily the first. Judge Douglas grew restive under it, and on one or two occasions challenged Lincoln to public debate, relying on his own magnetic eloquence to carry the day and floor his rival. Mr. Lincoln never sought and never shunned these encounters. Throughout Illinois Lincoln came to be considered the abler for close-knit logic, Douglas as the more eloquent and flowery. When the time came that men were willing to give much and anxious thought to pondering the issues whereon these two were pitted against each other, Abraham Lincoln was inevitably the gainer.

A Call on Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln in 1859

The joint debates of 1858 carried Lincoln's fame far beyond his own state. In the autumn of the year following (by which time I had become well established in business in the Queen City), he was called to Cincinnati, to answer an impassioned Squatter Sovereignty address Senator Douglas had recently delivered there. Mr. Lincoln spoke from the balcony over Kinsey's jewelry-store, on the north side of what was then the Fifth Street Market Space, but is now the open space adjoining the beautiful Fountain and Esplanade. It was on Saturday night, and the assemblage was immense. The meeting over, I elbowed my way to the door by which he must come out from the hallway to the street, and when he appeared, called him by name and extended my hand, which he clasped heartily. Almost dragging me through the surging crowd to where his carriage was in waiting, he said: "Gibson, get in; Mary is with me. She is at the hotel, and you must come down to see her." As it was already eleven o'clock, I told him it was too late, but if it would suit their arrangements I would call the next morning. With this understanding we parted, and when I called at the Burnet House (on Sunday forenoon) I was cordially welcomed, but by Mrs. Lincoln was as cordially scolded for not having brought Mrs. Harris. "I will be here this afternoon," she insisted; "you must be sure to bring her then."

The first and only meeting of the two ladies accordingly ensued. Tad Lincoln was with his mother, but Mr. Lincoln had been taken possession of by a bevy of politicians and carried off somewhere. The ladies were very soon on confidential terms. I was ignored, but I distinctly heard Mrs. Lincoln remark: "You are fortunate in having a husband who is not in politics. A politician is owned by everybody, and his wife has many lonely hours."

In the deadly strife of the Civil War several members of Mrs. Lincoln's family sided actively with the Confederates, while her husband, she well knew, had some deadly enemies North as well as South. The strain of such a situation must have been intense, and it is no wonder if she showed the effects of it.

An Incident of the Campaign

A peculiar incident of the presidential campaign of 1860 interests me still—the account that a New York gentleman gave me of a call he had made on Mr. Lincoln. "I was in Chicago," he said, "on the day the convention got through, and while I am a Democrat, I felt a great curiosity to see the man that everybody seemed to be going wild over. I made it my business to go to Springfield and call at Lincoln's law office, but he was not in. Then I went to his house, and was told I would probably find him in the Capitol Building, where a room had been set aside for his use during the campaign. I found the room easily, rapped on the door, and it was opened by a tall man, spare of build and homely featured. I told him I had come to see Mr. Lincoln. He asked me my name, took me by the arm, and introduced me to half a dozen gentlemen who were in the room with him. Then, as simple as a child, he said, 'My name is Lincoln.' In ten minutes I felt as if I had known him all my life. He has the most wonderful faculty for making a person feel at ease of any person I ever met. I came away with the feeling he was an extraordinary man, and I'm going to vote for him; more than that, I intend to influence all that I can to do the same."

A Social Hour With the President-Elect

Mr. Lincoln, in the character of President-elect *en route* to Washington, spent twenty-four hours in Cincinnati. The date was February 12, 1861, being his fifty-second birthday. After witnessing the parade of the afternoon and the handshaking at night, I went to the Burnet House, where Mr. Lincoln was again quartered, and sent up my card by a bell-boy, who promptly returned and bade me follow him. Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, sitting before a grate fire, were alone in their room, and they greeted me most pleasantly. The boys, Will and Tad, were out watching the crowds. I asked about Bob, and Mr. Lincoln said he was being dined by some of the young men of the city, and added that he was taking a course at Harvard, and was doing well there, though regretting to say his handwriting was miserable. The latter item, I knew, was

[CONCLUDED ON PAGE 24]

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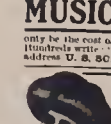

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My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11]

not meant for a shirt; Mr. Lincoln did not indulge in shirts, and was really proud of his oldest son, as well as fond of all his children. For nearly an hour we chatted without interruption, the time passing delightfully for us in reviving old memories and gaining the latest information respecting former friends in Springfield. Mrs. Lincoln took the lead, as was natural, social affairs being more directly in her line.

Before I left, Mr. Lincoln inquired whether I was satisfied with what I was doing, evidently intending it as an opening wedge. I did some fast thinking, and answered, "Yes." I had no claim upon him that would be recognized by the hungry horde of office-seekers who would soon be hounding him; the outlook, too, was for greater and deeper troubles, and to these I would not add. Did I wish afterward that I had answered Mr. Lincoln differently? Yes and no. At least two thirds of my business was with the South, mostly on four months' time and upward. When the Civil War broke out, private debts owing to Northern creditors were confiscated by the Confederate government, leaving us to whistle for our money. To make matters worse, business in Cincinnati, as throughout the greater part of the North, was virtually paralyzed. For ten months I had almost nothing to do. Then the tide turned. I made a successful bid on some government work, and was able to follow it up with others; a general revival of business came in 1862, and the answer I had given Mr. Lincoln entailed no more regret.

Negro Dolls for the President-Elect

Near the close of the above-mentioned interview with the President-elect, on February 12, 1861, Judge William M. Dickson, of Cincinnati (twenty years later killed in an accident on one of the inclines there), whose wife was a cousin of Mrs. Lincoln's, was announced. The greetings over, the Judge got off some rapid-fire questions, a number of which, as also the answers they elicited, I remember distinctly.

"Have you received any threatening letters, Mr. Lincoln?"

"Yes, quite a number—anonymous, of course."

"Have you no fear of possible attempts to execute these threats?"

"Oh, no. I reason that any one who threatens another man's life, yet lacks the courage to sign his name, is too cowardly to act."

Mr. Lincoln laughed, and added, "You ought to see the things, besides letters, that have been sent me." He mentioned some of them in a vein of pleasantry, but I cannot recall the particulars further than that negro dolls were the most numerous, though to him the most amusing was a whistle made from a pig's tail!

"What did you do with them?"

"I packed them in a trunk (or he may have said a box), to look them over with my friends when we get back to Springfield."

But he was never in Springfield again, in life.

Mistaken Portraitures of Abraham Lincoln

In closing these papers, with their chatted survey of "auld lang syne," I feel impelled to warn younger readers against accepting some of the latter-day presentations of the character and personality of Abraham Lincoln. For example, a recent article in a metropolitan daily pictures him as a political boss, than which hardly anything could be falser. Never in his life did he seek to attain a political end by a personal trick, and as for organizing a "machine," that would have been as far from his conception of practical politics as the east is from the west. He ever leaned upon the plain people for support; there was never the slightest attempt to round them up, as the unscrupulous manager of to-day prides himself on doing. He led them, it is true, but it was by virtue of his transcendent fairness, ability and courage. In weighing thoughtfully the appeals he made to their judgment and conscience his countrymen honored themselves, but no more than he had first honored them.

"Another Lincoln anecdote" has just fallen under my notice, vouched for by a journal of high reputation. It concerns a chimney, a mule and a plow; Abraham Lincoln leads the mule, while the older brother holds the plow. The story it is amusing enough, but—Mr. Lincoln's older brother was a sister! The only brother he ever had was a half-brother younger by many years. Why the fourth estate, so vigilant in many things, permits itself to be so grossly imposed upon in the way of Lincoln stories as it does is indeed a conundrum.

There, too, is the historical novel. It needs to be taken with many a grain of salt by whoever would get a true idea of the man Abraham Lincoln. One highly successful production in this department of literature points the moral for all its class. Though extremely interesting in its word-painting of life and conditions in St. Louis and the Southwest immediately before and during the Civil War, it is sadly misrepresentative in its labored portraiture of Lincoln. I record my earnest, serious protest against its putting "By Jing!" in the Martyr President's mouth, and even calling it "a favorite expression of his"; I cannot make myself believe that Lincoln ever used the phrase, or anything like it. Of all the men I have known well he was the least given to expletives.

The hotel scene with which the work in question introduces Lincoln to the reader is a gross caricature, despite the forced eulogies that interlard it; and the entire love-affair between the southern heroine and the Abolition President, near the end of the story, is equally misleading. Mr. Lincoln never in the world could have called the young lady "Jinny," the word would have choked him. If her name was Jane it would be "Miss Jane" with him; if Virginia, unfailingly "Miss Virginia." So far as this reader can learn he was a thorough Southerner. But the book's final word rings true. Abraham Lincoln did love the South, as well as the North.

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A young lady of Medina, New York, has recently had an experience which has made her envied by all her friends. She is Miss Rose Valente, of 142 Center Street. When asked for the facts, she modestly consented to discuss the matter, and simply showed the following letter, which she wrote to a prominent educator, and which fully explains her story:

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"As soon as I finished the course, I accepted a position that you gave me. I went to work with a great deal of nervousness. After the first day this passed away, because I quickly found out that the practical hints which you taught me enabled me to take hold at once, and by the second week I had charge of a set of books which would stagger many experienced bookkeepers. The fact that my employer has raised my salary twice within the past three months is the best proof that my work has been satisfactory. I advise any one who anticipates taking a course in bookkeeping to take your course. It would be impossible for any one to attend a business college and get the same attention that you give your students. I have learned that if one attends a business college he is filled full of a lot of fancy theories that amount to nothing when he begins practical work. Your course covers the entire field. When I accepted this position I seemed to have just exactly the knowledge I required.

"The advantage in taking a course by correspondence is that when you wish to refer to it you always have it handy, while in taking a personal course you must depend upon memory. During the first few days I was compelled to refer to the course. After I did this a few times I had no trouble.

"I inclose an express money order to pay my tuition. Your offer is certainly a fair one. I should like to know the business college that will allow its students to pay their tuition after the college places them in a position. They do not do this.

"You must pardon me if I appear too enthusiastic, but several of my friends treated this matter as a joke when I decided to take it up, and the joke is now on them. Had I gone to a business college I would not be through yet, and would have spent a great deal. As it now stands, I have a nice position, and did not have to pay a cent for instruction until you placed me in a position.

"Again thanking you for what you have done for me, I am very gratefully yours,

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